

## Moving from gender in the economy of care to gender relations in negotiating well being: changing environments, new conceptualisations and methodologies

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**Working Paper No. 350**

**Moving from gender in the economy of care to gender relations in negotiating well  
being: changing environments, new conceptualisations and new methodologies**

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## **Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

Is the economy of care still a good conceptualisation for the changes currently occurring in sub-Saharan Africa? Why is there a persistent invisibility of women and their contributions to both the reproduction and production work in society? Why is it that despite the change in gender roles, there is a persistent non dynamic change in gender power relations that pervade social relations of production and reproduction?

The work at hand is a contribution that sets out to develop new conceptualisations, methodologies and issues for research. It is an attempt to formulate new conceptualisations of gender relations beyond the household but which are in close intersection with household economies. This interface, as I would like to construe of it, is an intersection of the household and other social institutions like the market and the public sphere. How these social institutions intersect and how this affects decisions on who does what, when, with whom, with what, why and how things are to be done, are conceptual and methodological issues that will be here analysed.

The point of departure is that in Africa, relations between men and women at the social, economic and political spheres are undergoing specific and significant transformations. However, despite the specificities of the changes to a given situation and everyday realities as experienced by social groups in a given context, there has been little research on how inter-linkages at different levels do occur. Moreover, these specificities show commonalities, necessitating the development of concepts that cut across the geographical divide.

The central problem addressed by this paper is that of combining context specific, historically relevant but cross cutting (comparative) analytical lenses that address the changing nature of gender relations. This new way of looking further addresses the need for a re-conceptualisation of household economies by moving them to the contours of both the markets and the public sphere and interlinking them in order to tease out the continuities and discontinuities there of. The paper thus recognizes that although the economy of care is a good starting point, it has however failed to capture in its entirety the changing gender power relations in negotiating well being by securing entitlement to livelihood at the different but interlinked spheres of social life. As such therefore, the paper proposes a re-conceptualisation of gender in the economy of care to the analysis of gender relations in the negotiation of well being.

I further illustrate why the concept of negotiating well being and the gender power relations there in, is a much wider and relevant concept to the changing African everyday realities. I argue that once we adopt the concept of negotiating well being, then, it will be of necessity to redirect some of our epistemological and consequently conceptual and methodological approaches. It is through doing this that we may begin to appreciate the social realities as they present themselves to us.

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## Introduction

The work on which this paper<sup>2</sup> is based emanates from two significant sources. On the one hand it is a reflection partly born out of my Ph.D. thesis (Achieng' 2004), which looks at the centrality of women to reproduction and production of not only the household, but the community and the local markets at large. Taking the new social phenomenon of violent conflicts and displacements and the post conflict reconstruction taking place, I show in the thesis how internally displaced women, using their agency, are negotiating access to previous or new entitlements through appealing to societal institutions of kith and kin, friendship and neighbourhood ties, Church groups and self help groups. This is conceptualised as the gender embeddedness of social action in social institutions. Because these women are farmers, access to land and rural markets, to sell their products and secure livelihood possibilities is of crucial importance. However, lack of full access to previous entitlements coupled with the new pressure that the state of displacement introduces, for example, having to pay for rent, buy water in the slum area in which the women have now settled, necessitates the women to engage in multiple economic activities, to make ends meet and satisfy the demands of reproduction i.e. maintenance of labour and those of production.

To meet these demands of reproduction and production, I found out that women combine activities on land with selling vegetables and fruits at the market and engaging in 'illegal' and/or marginal activities like selling *mitumba* (second hand clothes) at the roadside, or in pubs in the evening and at night, or peddling these clothes (under cover) from one office to another. They combine these activities with others like selling illegal brew or operating illegal video kiosks in the rural slum areas where they are currently living in.

This has meant new pressures on women's time and a need for a clear division of labour. In the said research work I found out that there has now emerged co-operation between what I conceptualise as 'low status groups in society'. This co-operation exists, for example, between the internally displaced Kikuyu women and young men from different ethnic groups. Here a good example is co-operation between Kikuyu women and young Kalenjin men in doing some activities on the farm. The co-operation between the women and young Luhya men is more evident in the sale of second hand clothes<sup>3</sup>. In both cases, women act as 'agents' and the young men their 'clients'. A clear division of labour is thus evident. Other meanings attributed to this co-operation are a negotiation of protection and avoidance of risk. Another form of co-operation is between the women and their daughters, or a female next of kin. In this kind of co-operation, the latter become 'economic partners' by doing the same thing as their mothers but in different places. A crucial point to note here is the tendency towards 'adopting' daughters, who are

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<sup>2</sup> It was presented at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA 2004). The institute had Gender in the Economy of Care, as its working theme. I thank Prof. Gudrun Lachenmann for her initial comments and consequent remarks on the paper.

<sup>3</sup> The theme of ethnicity and ethnic relations is a recurrent one in Africa. In Kenya, where 42 different ethnic groups live together, coupled with others who have migrated from neighbouring countries due to political or economic instability, this theme has been on the lime light for a long time with different schools of thought manifesting themselves. On the one hand are those who look at the essentialism of ethnic belonging. Others look at ethnic relations from an instrumentalism view point whereas the other group analyses ethnicity from an interaction perspective. This paper builds on the latter view.

female next of kin or daughters of friends. There is furthermore a notable change of meaning that money, economic activities and social relationships acquire in the face of these new pressures.

This observation directly feeds into the question of the new emerging gender identities. In my research I have shown through the concept of trans-locality, that Kikuyu women are now negotiating a new pluralistic identity. By co operating with Kikuyu-Kalenjin women (their sisters married to Kalenjin men), with Kalenjin women or with young Kikuyu-Kalenjin men (their nephews) in certain activities in the rhythmic cycle of crop production, in the sale of subsistence crops at the market or in the diversified economic activities that they engage in, Kikuyu women are not only negotiating changes in gender order, but are also negotiating an ethnic pluralism based on neighbourhood and friendship ties. Regarding the question of identity, a new category of women perceived as 'social men' (female breadwinners) is beginning to emerge. This consequently led to the formation of new gender identities with new economic, social and political possibilities and opportunities. For example, in my research I found out that women are now negotiating physical protection through engaging the help of young men, as body guards/male protectors. However, risk avoiding in a broad sense and what this means to the issue of newly emerging masculinities and its new displays and the competing issues of femininity (more especially what this would mean to young women's empowerment, economic independence and issues of gender equity and rights) is a question that is still at large and which ought to be further researched and explanations sought for.

These phenomena of 'new' room for economic, social and political manoeuvre and the changing relations of power, materialise two further issues. On the one hand is the emergence and proliferation of new activities that can be identified as informal economic means of livelihoods. These means of livelihoods at the margin include for example, commercial sex work, sale of illegal brew, drugs or engaging in other illegal activities. However, the new meaning that these activities are given and the new possibilities to meet the needs of reproduction and production of labour is a question that has hardly begun to be analysed, but which form part of a growing informalised economy which is not separate from the formal<sup>4</sup>.

In the political sphere, there are emerging 'new' places that can be defined as female spaces. These places are not exclusively for women, but rather women interlink with the larger society. In this way, they seek to change the existing discrepancies in the social order. In my current research I have identified the Church place as one of the places that has been transformed into a political space for women. Here I have analysed how women groups comprising different categories of women have transformed the Church place into a public space, where they meet together to critically reflect upon and negotiate new ways of bringing about societal change. In my thesis, I have shown how they have negotiated and are acting out the principle of good neighbourliness (*ujirani wema* in Swahili) as a common good and a principle of subsidiarity across localities in providing

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<sup>4</sup> A start in the direction of analysing how to reduce the binaries introduced by polarising the formal and the informal economy is currently in the pipeline. This is by looking at the interface of the two and what is produced out of this interface situation. For such an analysis see Lachenmann (2001) and Kobou (2004).

for essential social services. Examples of such social acts of solidarity being promoted by these women groups are paying of school fees for children who have lost both parents, supporting sporting activities across localities, supporting exchange of exam papers, and exchange excursions of children to different areas inhabited by a different ethnic group. Income generating groups, loan and banking groups, are some of the initiatives that women are coming up with as part of mechanisms for social security.

The identification of third sector groups and civil society groups and the crucial role they play between society and markets on the one hand, and society and State on the other, is of crucial importance. In the wake of the weakened capacity of the State (either through corruption or detrimental policies) to provide or the expanding boundaries of unemployment and poverty, third sector groups are re-emerging as crucial actors in regulating or addressing State-market discrepancies. Many double up as civil society groups which negotiate State-society relations especially in pressing for social (development) policy and political reforms. The critical interface here is in negotiation of mechanisms for social security that are embedded in social institutions emergent of a given context. Such groups further address critical discrepancies in the system and come up with policy formulations that are within the reach of the common woman and in this way sustainable. How these issues feature in the political agenda of the day, and how public policy is being challenged and changed into their favour is an issue that is yet to be fully integrated in research.

For example, in my work I found out that although poverty levels are increasing unabated, paradoxically, there is a proliferation of rural informal saving banks run by women groups, or even rural marketing groups to get produce from town to other markets in the interior. The former forms a new area of scientific inquiry especially in this era of escalating deaths due to HIV-AIDS and the increasing need for social security mechanisms, especially, when the sole breadwinner dies. Women groups are coming together to form funeral-financing groups to collect and save money for times of crisis. This cash is seen as insurance to cover hospital bills, burial expenses, mortuary bills etc. Moreover more groups are being formed that run health caring services or even those that engage in hearth (corpse) treatment, running vans that carry the corpse to area of burial, casket making groups, or even catering and tailoring services. A critical question that is reflected upon here is the re-distributive mechanisms as is being realised in society. Furthermore, how civil society groups have taken up and are debating what such rural social action that could bring about rural social transformation would mean to public policy in realising a just, equitable, self-sustaining society is a further question implied in the theme of negotiating well being.

As has been mentioned above, the reflections in this paper are also partly born out of the debates that surrounded the working theme of the 2004 CODESRIA Gender Institute in Dakar, Senegal (CODESRIA 2004). Several salient issues earmarked the discussions of the day. These were the changing nature of the household, where increasingly there is an emergence and growing importance of female heads of households. Female headship of households as a new social phenomenon challenges the earlier notion of the family bread winner and sole decision maker as being male. It however inversely calls to attention the

increasing displays of masculinities as against femininity. Moreover, whereas before female headship of household was linked to the destabilizing consequences of migrant labour systems, today, it has been reinforced by the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the spate of violent conflicts occurring across the continent, and the increase in the number of displaced persons.

The institute with its working theme on gender in the economy of care recognized that the current social changes being experienced in the sub-continent evokes a reconstitution of the earlier understanding of what a household should encompass. The centrality of the labour of women to household production and reproduction and, ultimately, the production and reproduction of the economy at the local, national and regional levels, which have hardly begun to be questioned or when so, are overridden by other issues, formed the main themes of the institute.

Previous academic preoccupations with the household from a gender point of view have involved African feminists in a close interrogation of history, tradition and culture, the mode of construction and exercise of patriarchal power, the contradictory interface between patriarchy and matriarchy and within these categories as well, the framework for the structuring of opportunities between the girl-child and the boy-child, the gender/sexual division of labour, the dynamics of domesticity, and the practice of male power and masculinity, including domestic violence of various kinds. Interest has also been shown in the household as a site of a complex of transactions, production, exchange, socialisation, affection, and identity formation (Imam, Mama and Sow 1999). However, other macro structures, especially the institutions of the market, the public sphere and the debates that occur within, and how these contribute to the reconstitution of the household still form the lesser bulk of research (Tsikata 1999, Mbilinyi 1999). Moreover, these inter-linkages of the micro with the macro and the continuities or discontinuities in the everyday realities in sub-Saharan Africa, are questions that have hardly begun to be addressed.

It is within the challenge posed to the participants in the 2004 Gender Institute to explore various aspects and dimensions of the economy of care as viewed from the perspective of the changing requirements for the upkeep and well-being of the family, the reconstitution of the division of labour within the household, and the re-composition of male – female relations at a time of broad-ranging retrenchments that have affected the State and State capacity for social provision, the public sector, the local economy, the health status of the citizenry and the stability of the polity, that this paper is constructed.

In light of the foregoing, certain critical aspects emerge which need to be interrogated afresh and new conceptualisations, analytical lenses and new methodologies developed. The aim of this discussion and the debates introduced is therefore, to develop analytical (methodological) and conceptual tools that capture these changing realities. Furthermore, it becomes of importance at this juncture to move the analysis from where it currently is (household relations), to cover the new frontiers that are introduced by the various social, economic and political dynamisms (that is markets, the public sphere and the new

relations of power) relating to African everyday realities from an African Feminist point of view.

### **What the old debate was about: household as a field of contestation**

Sagrario Floro (1995) in her article on economic restructuring, gender and the allocation of time asserts that a significant aspect of economic life takes place in an area of production largely ignored in standard macroeconomic analysis. This is the household production of non-marketed goods and services. This 'invisible' segment of the economy is even more important in developing countries, given the extent of market incompleteness and market failures. Households provide a wide array of goods and services for their own use and consumption including subsistence crop cultivation, gather water and fuel, food preparation and housecleaning, care for the children and elderly and other voluntary work.

The author continues to assert that there is a dynamic interaction between non-market activities and that of the market economy as household members, especially women, must allocate their time between the two sets of economic activities. Thus any changes require an evaluation of the interrelated changes in the production and consumption of both the market and non-marketed goods and services, distribution and intensity of women's work, combinations of tasks and the lengthening and intensification of women's labour time, in order to begin to comprehend issues of well being.

A similar analysis has been done by Aredo (1992) of the gender division of labour and the allocation of women's time between private and co operative farms in two Ethiopian villages. Kaufulu (1992) has also shown this in her study of rural and urban Malawi. Davies (1996) statistically analyses how work can be valued, whilst Haugien (1994) discusses the methodological issues in studying women's time.

The invisible aspect of what was considered women's work is a theme that the various streams of feminist<sup>5</sup> thought have long grappled with. Since the 70s to date, various dimensions of what was first analysed as care work and thereafter as unpaid work, voluntary work or community work and is now being discussed as the economy of care, has been variously debated. What the various branches of feminists across the board seek

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<sup>5</sup> There are various streams of feminisms with very distinct agendas and criticisms leveled against the other. These branches of feminist thought include the liberal, radical, socialist and post-modern feminisms. For an analysis of these streams of feminist thoughts see Tong (1989). Mohanty and Torres (1991) and Mohanty and Alexander (1997) critically discuss some of the emerging feminisms in the so called Third World and the issues that they address. Mama (1996) and Hutchful (1997:206-214) equally carve out a space for what they conceptualize as African Feminism with its unique blend of social, economic and political issues, colonial legacies, post-colonial realities and women's everyday politics. In their view, there needs to be a renewed interrogation of the social, cultural, economic and political spheres, reconstructing them anew. The emphasis should be on bringing women to the fore by challenging the persistent inequalities experienced today stemming from a misconstrued historical analysis of women's place in African societies. Such a deconstruction should also interrogate the social structures that women find themselves in, with a view of showing the spaces that women have been able to carve out for themselves despite the post-colonial structural constraints. It is a view which I adopt by emphasizing women's capabilities to change structural constraints. These I call female modes of action. Furthermore, I lay emphasis on the basis of this agency, which I argue recognizes the social-cultural institutions in society and the gender relations there in.



to deconstruct and thus bring to the fore is the invisibility of women's work. The underlying agenda is to make visible the invisible as a corrective to the neglect of women's work in all aspects of the economy (Elson 1997:184, Tsikata 2004a:5).

Pearson and Jackson (1998) and Lachenmann (1999, 2001) introduce their studies by giving a background of the evolution of feminism and gender analysis in development policy and practice. They unanimously assert that critical feminist theory which has over the time come to bear, seeks to critically deconstruct key social institutions like the household, the notion of economy, the separation of the economic and social and the 'unnecessary' dualism that exists between production and reproduction. It further seeks to interrogate the efficacy of organisations within the civil society to respond to the needs of the people at the 'basis', given the residing capabilities of the State to ensure an upward rise in living standards of its citizens (Pearson and Jackson 1998: 2- 4, Lachenmann and Dannecker 2001: 1-12).

Critical to these analyses, which form the central point in the deconstruction, is that it is not women per se who are to be problematised, but rather gender power relations in which women are subordinated that ought to be problematised. Such an analytical concentration thus drives the centrality of gender analysis in the development of effective policies at all levels and in this way, re orienting them towards the engendering discourse (Cagatay, Elson, Grown: 1995, Lachenmann: 1999). Such a shift of focus means that at the crux of gender analysis is the interrogation of social relations that are context specific. Lachenmann (1999), for example, conceptualises this in her analysis of economy and its concurrent institutions as the engendering embeddedness of economy in society and culture.

The first place that the deconstruction needed to occur was at the household level. This debate was heavily taken up by Asian Feminists whose main concern was the decision making processes at the household, the allocation of income, time and access to resources. Some of these concerns have also been articulated by African Feminists. In this paper, I will limit myself to some of the literature that has specifically discussed the household relations, as this we will agree unanimously, is our point of departure.

Writing on struggles over meaning and method in the study of household economics, Kabeer (1998) criticizes the New Household Economics' conceptualisations of looking at decisions in the house as a joint welfare activity based on factors such as labour, technology and purchased goods and services or the z-goods (Kabeer 1998:92). She extrapolates her analysis to intra-household economies, where she again pinpoints to two deficiencies on which the New Household Economics' conceptualisations rested. These are the joint welfare maximization on the one hand and the unified preferences and pooled resources with a benevolent (male) head of household as the sole decision maker, on the other hand. Others who have criticized these approaches are Guyer: 1981, Whitehead: 1981, Guyer and Peters: 1987, Agarwal: 1990, Moore: 1992, Lachenmann: 1992, Folbre: 1994, Kandiyoti: 1998, and CODESRIA 2004, to name but a few 'Third World' feminist authors.

Kabeer (1998) goes on to give an example of gender related inflexibilities in intra-household labour allocation. Here, she looks at the allocation of time, wages and work done. By drawing on comparative cases, she shows that women work longer hours than men (in rural Africa, for example, due to their involvement in farm labour on their own fields and obligations to work on men's fields as well as their responsibility for domestic labour.) Where women are involved in paid work, there is a likelihood to combine three categories of work. These she categorizes as wages, expenditure-replacing and domestic chores. She further goes on to show that where women have children, there is an increase in maternal work and the decrease in maternal leisure. Where a family has grown daughters and sons, women's involvement in wage earning activities lead to a greater reduction in daughters' labour market participation and increased involvement in domestic chores. This is however not the case with sons (Kabeer 1998:96-97). She brings her analysis to a third level by showing that whereas women work long hours, have a capacity for productive mobility, they spend more time on domestic work, which is unpaid. Lachenmann (2001) uses the term the lack of upgrading for women in the economic sphere. See Elson (1997:176) for a similar point of view.

Kabeer (1998) goes on to assert that within and across households, there are preferences and there is bargaining (I prefer the use of the term negotiation) going on. She categorizes these preferences of how women combine time with both paid and unpaid tasks under three alternative approaches. These are the efficiency approach, co-operation as long as the gains from co-operation out way the gains from separation, and the non-co operative models which assume that individual members not only have differing preferences but may operate as autonomous sub-economies. This is the separate spheres model, where each individual controls her/his own income and disposes of it according to their individual (non-pooled) constraint.

On her part, Kandiyoti (1998) in her article on gender power and contestation, starts by stressing that the household is a locus of competing interests, rights, obligations and resources, where household members are often involved in bargaining, negotiation and possibly conflict (Kandiyoti 1998: 135). She identifies relations as what should entail a re-conceptualisation of the household. These should also include an analytical and empirical focus on the gendered politics of negotiation, co-operation and contestation in different but intersecting institutional arenas (Meena: 1992, Moore: 1994 and Lachenmann: 1996(a)(b) share this same view). Hence the conceptualisation of rights and needs as an arena of struggle over their establishment, interpretation and satisfaction (Fraser 1989) is based on the analytical question of who gets what through which sort of work as a local theory of entitlement (Moore 1994, Lachenmann 2001:31).

The constitution of women's agency in negotiating entitlements is a key element which opens up the scope of analysis by interlinking the different forms of households to economic, social and political spheres of society.

### **Questioning the confines of the old debate within African environments**

African environments present a special way of looking at the old debates beyond the confines of the old conceptualisation of the household. The social changes taking place in

Africa, which have been introduced by macro processes, for example, SAPs, violent conflicts, HIV AIDs have produced paradoxical changes in the very composition of the household, of the members that constitute it and more especially of how members negotiate access to various kinds of entitlements in order to secure their livelihoods.

At a time when various social groups grapple with the challenging experiences and what this means to the individuals themselves, or to the different familial arrangements, social relations in the community and the society at large, new ways of explaining these social phenomena need to be explored.

These new ways should capture the dynamism in both social and gender relations and how the society at large is being transformed or reconstituted. More especially what the dynamisms introduce to the gender and power relations and the meanings that these dynamisms evoke to the social relations at large, is an issue that will be explored in detail in the following sections.

African feminists have been grappling to bring to the fore and explain these changing phenomena. There is indeed a growing body of literature which explores these changes. In this article, I will limit myself to a few which formed the resource material and issues of discussion for the gender institute 2004<sup>6</sup> and some selected proposals of laureates present, to illustrate the points I want to make.

Samadi (2004) discusses the example of modern Tunisia, where she analyzes the changing forms of family. Her main emphasis lay on the contractual nature of modern family systems in Tunisia, which she called the conjugal family. The rationality underlying the modern conjugal family in Tunisia is individual liberty as opposed to kin relations, competition as opposed to communality and legal contracts as opposed to relationships of the affective type. She furthermore emphasized consumerism as the new domestic culture which does not correlate with the assumption of the household as a place where a moral economy based on reciprocity and solidarity is exercised. Whereas in sub-Saharan Africa this reality may exist especially in the urban areas, what is more evident is the rise of complex forms of nuptiality. For example, Antoine (2004) illustrating his examples with biographical data collected from several francophone and anglophone countries, showed the changing composition of the family in Africa today. Delineating access to resources as the basis of this change, he showed that currently, there is increase in the number of divorce in Africa. Paradoxically, especially in francophone West Africa, there is an increase in polygamous marriages whereby the woman marries 2 to 3 times.

The critical question to ask here is, in the event of this changing composition of the family and familial arrangements, can we still take the household as the primary unit of analysis? Or should our analysis be transposed to the different familial arrangements that are presented by the changes?

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<sup>6</sup> There were five resource persons at the CODESRIA 2004 gender institute who explored different topics related to the theme at hand. Their presentations can be accessed at CODESRIAs documentation centre or under [http://www.codesria.org/training and grants/genderinstitute](http://www.codesria.org/training_and_grants/genderinstitute).

This conceptualization of new familial arrangements that opposes the notion of a household as composed of a male breadwinner, the woman and children, brings to the fore the increasing importance of female bread-winner. Fatou (2004) in her analysis of divorce in Senegal shows for example the increasing importance of divorced women to continued reproduction and production of community and society at large. However, this new category of women is still not being recognized in society. Despite the changes in their 'roles', women's status and more especially how society views them, still remains the same. The non recognition of the newly acquired status in society, pushes some of the women to remarry in order to maintain the status quo despite their economic independency. Indeed there is no negotiation of power relations! This similar angle of analysis is what Tshibwabwa (2004) and Kabamba (2004) subtly allude to. In their analysis of post conflict Congolese society reconstructing itself by engaging in new livelihood strategies both in the informal sector and in the diamond trade respectively, they show that despite the contribution made by women in feeding the children, educating them, taking care of hospital bills and even supporting men by giving them money earned from their various trading activities, few women have been able to rise above their current poverty levels. It seems to me that there is a persistent and continuous feminization of poverty (Folbre 1994, Agarwal 1994) and persistent unequal gender power relations displayed through continued and new forms of masculinities.

In support of this thesis, Awasom (2004) gives examples of female petty traders like the '*buyem sellem*', nocturnal food vendors, snack hawkers, who despite their well-off economic status have not been able to significantly change the unequal power relations dominant in the economic sphere. Their economy, despite its being lucrative and contributing significantly to both reproduction and production, is still treated as marginal, illegal and informal. This means that the above economy is still on the margins of the 'formal' economy. In this way, it does not benefit from the State policies in the sense of getting this economy upgraded. Rather, the State's authoritative and bureaucratic measures descends on it, making it 'vulnerable' to State's corruptive practices and in this way the economy delves deeper into a vicious cycle of insecurity that is not of its own making.

Antoine (2004) stresses the point by illustrating that statistical demographic surveys have not begun to include this new category of female breadwinners as an important category in household surveys and analysis. There is still an invisibility of this new and important category of women. This view is supported by Kikooma (2004) in his analysis of outstanding female entrepreneurs in Uganda, who despite their various achievement and contribution to economy, are treated as living on the margins of society and in this sense alienated.

In my view, this kind of continued invisibility, alienation and un-recognition of the newly emerging categories and identities of women in society (single unmarried female breadwinners or divorced female breadwinners) can begin to be understood and explanations sought for, once we interlink the different familial arrangements with the market and debates going on or not going on at the public sphere. We ought to do this in

order to comprehend the continuities and discontinuities introduced and thus the transformations occurring and how this ought to be reflected upon.

### **Moving beyond the household into the markets: markets as gendered institutions that reconstruct gender relations and identities**

From the examples given above, we see that in order to counteract the increasing insecurity, more and more women are engaging in the informal sector. By bringing in markets as gendered institutions, we begin to make the crucial linkage of how decisions on activities done at the market (i.e. productive activities) necessarily affect what will be cooked and eaten by whom at the end of the day (i.e. the reproductive activities). The critical linkage in this view is the shift of focus from dwelling only within the household to looking at the inter-linkage with other societal institutions. In this discussion markets and the public sphere form part of these societal institutions.

Lachenmann (1996, 1999, 2000, 2001) argues that gender relations are necessarily social relations. To study gender, we must thoroughly understand the social context. This is what she conceptualises as the process of contextualization. (I will return to this issue when discussing the issue of methodology). The latter author suggests that when looking at economy as an institution, it is essential to look at what she conceptualises as the female economy. The latter is part of the economic sphere that necessarily rests on understanding gender relations. In this kind of female economy, one should endeavour to show women's agency in socio-economic relations and how women through gender relations that transverse the local, are able to form co operative mechanisms in order to meet the obligations of reproduction and the needs of production. This is what she calls embedding<sup>7</sup> economic relations in gender relations (Lachenmann, 2000, 2001: 29- 33) or the gender embeddedness of economic action. She thus articulates the same opinion as Elson (1999) who posits that markets are gendered institutions operating at the intersection of the productive and reproductive economies. The two authors are in accordance in articulating that markets are structured by practices, perceptions, norms and networks which are bearers of gender. The latter feminist economist argues that the most fundamental way in which markets (here she stresses labour markets) are gendered institutions is the manner in which they operate at the intersection of ways in which people make a living and care for themselves, their children, their relatives and friends.

Activities which help one make a living, are recognized by economists as economic activities which should in principle be counted as part of national production. This sum of largely market oriented work she provisionally defines as 'productive work'. She continues to assert that the unpaid, un-marketed caring work is critical for the functioning of the productive economy, since it reproduces, on a daily and intergenerational basis, the labour force which works the productive economy. This is the reproductive economy (Elson 1999: 612). She identifies and discusses labour markets as one form that points to

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<sup>7</sup> The embeddedness approach follows the substantive school of Polanyi (1941), Granovetter (1998) and the moral economy of Scott (1976), who views economic relations as influenced, determined and dictated by social relations based on a principal of sharing.

the intersection of these two economies, but which operate in ways which fail to acknowledge the contributions of the reproductive economy (Elson 1999:612).

She (Elson) goes on to give an illustration of maternal vs. paternal leave and taking care of children, where she argues that most labour market institutions are constructed on the basis that the burdens of the reproductive economy will be and should be borne by women. For instance, arrangements for paternal leave are far less widespread than maternal leave. Where they do exist, there are many barriers to men taking up their entitlements, because promotion often depends upon showing 'commitment' to the job, and paternal leave may be interpreted as a sign of weak commitment to the job. Domestic responsibilities penalize women in the labour market and are a key factor in women's weak position in terms of earnings and occupations. Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) in their article "Who takes the credit?", have analysed loan use and control among women in rural credit programs in Bangladesh from a similar point of view. Elson (1999) is further of the opinion that although labour markets seem to adapt to combine paid work with unpaid work, for example, part time work with home based work, this kind of adaptation is one sided as it does not give weight to the contribution that women's unpaid work makes to the productive economy. However, she cautions that paid work does not mean empowerment on the part of women, precisely because being paid does not necessarily entail retaining significant control of the income, or making decisions about what should be done with money earned or even in many cases a reduction in income from other sources, mostly from the fathers of their children, or an accruing demand to satisfy needs of family members. There is thus a feminization of poverty (Folbre: 1994, Agarwal: 1994).

A point that she stresses is that although labour market participation opens up new opportunities, it also brings about new risks. There is a risk of entitlement failure (Dreze and Sen, 1989:23), that is, a failure to establish command over sufficient resources for survival, owing to loss of employment, a drop in wages or a rise in prices as evidenced in numerous SAP analyses (Olukoshi 1996, Gladwin 1991, Tsikata 2004 b). Elson however deplores that such mechanisms have been much more a feature of male forms of market participation. The means which include trade unions, job security rights, social insurance benefits, business and professional associations have typically been constructed on the assumption that women employees are secondary earners who can draw upon the assets and earnings of male partners, husbands, fathers, brothers etc, to cushion them against risk. The assumption is that, women have extended entitlements. The possibility of earning an income of their own may empower them to take more decision about their own lives, but it may also cut them off from support by male kin, leaving them on their own and newly vulnerable to market forces. Again as Tshibwabwa (2004) and Kabamba (2004) have discussed, although the 'mama bipupula' – women engaged in commerce and the 'tshitantiste' the local money lenders, may be women with economic power, new insecurities are introduced. Risk reducing mechanisms and what can be conceptualised as alternative modes of accumulation (Geschiere and Könings 1993) are therefore important for analysis.

Achieng' (2004) in her discussion of women in the informal sector, especially women in the sale of second hand trade *mitumba*, has shown that indeed there is now networking among women and young men in the trade, not only to gather information, but also to form bonds of solidarity and trust in order to avoid risks of various kinds. The critical issue here is that of social security through co operative capacities. Risk reducing mechanisms by women formulated by women themselves and involving networks of whatever relations to cushion them against risks are therefore an important theme in addressing household-market integration. These mechanisms can be conceptualised as new economic room for manoeuvre.

Lachenmann (1996, 1999, 2000, 2001:16) has argued that markets, especially subsistence markets, for food and social security, in sub-Saharan countries, do indeed show a powerful but ignored intersection of both the reproductive and productive economies. Taking an example of the SAP introduced reforms, she takes issue with feminist economists whom, she suggests, put special emphasis on the interconnection between the presupposed reforms and embeddedness of concomitant economic action on societal institutions, time structures and gender relation without critically looking at ways women are trying to make their economy visible (Lachenmann 2001:16). In her opinion, these institutions should be deconstructed. Feminist economists although they work with the assumption that markets are social institutions, their stance is that market and the economy have a gender inequality which they reproduce and diversify in such a way that there is an inherent vicious cycle of gender inequality within market institutions and the economy (Lachenmann 2001:30). In her opinion such a stance does not sufficiently make visible the invisibility of reproductive work that most women do. Neither does it move the analysis to look at new rooms for manoeuvre that women form in order to address and conquer these inequalities. She asserts that what could be more profitable for gender analysis in economy and markets would be to look at the interfaces, the different levels of interconnection of both the reproductive and productive work and not the dualism with which male economists still approach the issue. Thus, by looking at the inter-linkages between reproductive work and productive work, the crucial question of who has the obligation and the responsibility to do what, why and in which time is brought to the foreground. This is conceptualised here as the access to entitlement (see also Razavi 1999:424). In this way the dimension of subsistence production (care economy) will be captured, in the sense of fully understood, as it will be brought out of the black box in which it is put by seeing and recognizing its critical inter-linkages to the other sectors. In this way other questions of security, like food security, social security, access to other basic needs and better social services and their concomitant entitlements will begin to be addressed in a more sustainable way. This is what is conceptualised in this paper as part of negotiating well-being.

For our discussion on new conceptualisations and methodologies, this observation is of importance in the sense that it seeks to bring to sharp focus the interconnections between the reproductive (unpaid care work) and productive sector, the division of work there in, who does what at what particular time and what the concomitant obligations are (the social character of production). By looking at the interconnection of both the reproductive and productive sectors, what is brought at the fore is how one sector rests on

the other, the key actors and their modes of action and interaction. Through the intersection, discrepancies or discontinuities are also highlighted. The transformations that depict themselves or those that are necessary (more especially concerning the poverty discourse) are sought.

A criticism which can be seen in the earlier models of gender equality, empowerment and equity in attacking poverty, is its modernization tendencies, which did not take into account the social reality in the so called Third World countries. The analysis of the economy using the interface approach does not look at traditional division of labour as stressful and undesirable for women and therefore seek a gender equality that is unrealistic in the sense of looking for a uniformity of gender in economic structure. In contrast, in the interface approach one analyses the gender differentiations in which women access different income possibilities (diversification of modes of accumulation) and invest in different sources and hence avoid risks in different ways.

By looking at issues in this interlinked way, reproduction and production will not be taken in such a dualistic manner and hence ways of uniformity sought for. Rather the different interfaces, interconnections and dimensions of co operation and consequently necessary transformation or potentials for transformation for a sustainable economy will be brought to the foreground. This is a view that Mama (1997:16) shares. The two authors advocate for concepts and lines of thinking that help to push feminist thinking beyond the neo-liberal thinking of equality. Tsikata (2004) in her two discussions shows for example how rural livelihoods are increasingly shaping urban livelihoods and vice versa in this new era of economic hardships. The point she makes in her analysis of two rural communities in the lower Volta basin in Ghana is to look at the interconnections and the changes that they bring about.

Recent analysis that the women's organisation Development Alternatives for Women in a New era (DAWN) has already been doing of especially criticising the privatisation of the economy and the residual role of the State in providing important social services (Taylor 2000), are very fruitful. Further analysis should indeed be looking at how societal groups are coming up with their own potentials, how market integration especially of subsistence (informal) production is taking place and in this way how poverty (basic needs fulfilment) is being tackled or should be done (cost sharing) and where the State should help or not indulge in matters.

The social character of production brings to focus the issue of actors and their networks. Here, the concept of female room for manoeuvre, which is defined through division of labour, different responsibilities and production and also social institutions emergent of a context are of analytical importance. The question to ask here is how this female room for manoeuvre is integrated in the society, how differences are maintained, and how women are integrated in politics and in policy making processes. Moreover to recognize this division of labour and therefore how different arrangements and co operations are made possible, one ought to look at the sequence of work, responsibilities, modes of co operation and specialization and look for the dynamics of change.



In this era of increased movements of goods, people and news from one location to another, the concept of trans-locality might be of a great potential for analysis of the gendered embeddedness of the economy. The concept basically looks at inter-linkages to tease out how one place is interconnected to another through diverse social interaction. By shifting the contours of analysis from economy of care, to negotiating well-being, then the possibility of seeing how places are interconnected is made possible. How trans-locality feeds into the wider conceptualisation of the economy of care, especially by analysing relations of migration, respective exchanges and transfer of goods, people and money is a critical methodological starting point that needs to be included in our analysis.

### **Bringing in politics: the necessary but forgotten public sphere**

With the continued proliferation of third sector groups and civil society groups, the State and its responsibility to its citizens is being forgotten or pushed to a corner. This is because States are being perceived as inefficient, corrupt, bureaucratic and removed from people's reality. With the increase in neo-liberal policies of privatisation and recline of the State in people's life, people are bearing the brute of having to do it alone!

Gouws (2004) is of the opinion that we have to take the State at task if changes are to be seen and people's safety nets rescued. This, she posits, is because the State has a mandate to provide some basic necessities and facilities to its citizens.

The glaring truth is that in Africa, a welfare State cannot be conceived of. Nevertheless, partnerships between the State and several societal groups like third sector groups should be where research should be aimed at. In this way, we should be looking at points of convergence or points where the State should be left alone to provide for services, or where the State should not be interfering.

At this level of debate, the issue of insecurities and risks, especially food insecurity which is tied to access to land, and social-economic in-capabilities ought to be analytical focal points. More especially, analysis should tease out the new forms of security and risk avoidance mechanisms based on networks of relations that societal groups are coming up with. How these actions are being visualized/not visualized, debated upon or not debated upon at the public sphere ought to form further points of reflection. I have shown (Achieng' 2004) how women have turned the Church place into a public space, where they debate on societal issues, for example, social provisioning, debate on the common good and possible redistributive mechanisms in society. Molyneux (1998), Nzomo (1995) and Tamale (2002) have also done analysis in this direction. Conversely, there is a rising feeling of autochthony as against "aliens" in the search and acquisition of entitlements. How such groups (female social movements) find ways to address the discrepancies they envisage by arguing out on the issue of social responsibility, a just redistributive mechanism in society, form some of the issues that could be explored when we move our analysis from gender in the economy of care, to gender relations in negotiating well-being.

### **New wine in new wineskin: gender relations in negotiating well-being – or a broader conceptualisation of gender in the economy of care?**

Given the above peculiarities, it therefore goes without much ado that there is a dire need to change some of the conceptualisations that still hold currency within the economy of care in order to begin to interrogate the changing nature of household economies and its linkages to wider societal institutions. Especially, the political dimension has hardly been interrogated and represents a whole new realm of research issues, which need to be explored.

It is my opinion that the first place to start with is to re-conceptualise the notion of the economy of care so that it captures the complexities that have been explored above. To this end, **gender relations in negotiating well-being**, I propose, is a much wider term which encompasses diverse but interrelated issues.

### **Why negotiating well-being?**

In an extensive range of writings, Sen (1985a, 1985b) has used the term well-being in his analysis of famines, poverty and deprivations. He conceptualises well-being as functionalities and capabilities (Sen 1990:125). He identifies functionings as what a person manages to do or to be, and capabilities as the different combinations of beings and doings she or he is able to achieve. In his notion of capability thus, he seeks to indicate a space within which comparisons of quality of life or standard of living are most fruitful. Nussbaum (2000) has developed an alternative conceptualisation of well-being which builds on Sens'. She embraces a broad vision of human flourishing based on functional capabilities. In this she tries to go beyond the comparative use of the capability space to articulate an account of how capabilities, together with the idea of a threshold level of capabilities, can provide a basis for central constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments (Nussbaum 2000:11 – 13).

In this paper, well-being is conceptualized as having access to adequate, suitable and sufficient entitlements to ensure quality or good life. Moreover, this access is defined and made able through social networks of relations which I argue are basically, gender relations of power.

The on going debate of entitlement has among its precursors, Sen (1981, 1985a), and Sen and Dreze (1989). The authors describe entitlement as a bundle of ownership rights to something. This ownership connects one set of ownerships to another through certain rules of legitimacy. The set of ownership the authors deem of importance is that which they call the exchange entitlement (which is connected with a market economy). This is the set of all the alternative bundles of commodities that one can acquire in exchange for what one owns (Sen 1981:3-4). He (Sen) continues to assert that the exchange entitlement faced by a person depends on her/his position in the economic class structure as well as the modes of production in the economy.

In his (their) analysis however, a number of assumptions are indeed debatable. Firstly is the issue of rights and the notion of ownership as applied in an African context. In this latter context, there are multiple and overlapping rights regulated by social relations and

not merely institutionalized legal systems (Berry 1993). Secondly, his (their) analysis is hinged on societies where one can argue that a class structure exists with institutionalized legal systems regulating the interaction within these class systems.

The view of entitlement that I adopt here is one which involves negotiation of access to social, economic or political options that is based on an appeal to a network of social institutions of relations in society. The social relations that are here analyzed are the gender relations. This kind of entitlement is socially situated, it flows from societal networks and institutions and is regulated by these. These societal networks, I argue, are pluralistically defined, cutting across different ethnic and gender groups. In this way social action in accessing entitlement is embedded in a particular social-cultural context.

I further more find that negotiation is a better term to use as it entails social interaction (Schutz 1970). These interactions are necessarily gendered interactions. They occur on the basis of gender relations. Interactions involve a process of dialoguing, where groups of persons (network of relations) use their agency in order to access entitlements. Individuals are therefore seen as capable to change their situations. Negotiation is further divorced from the bargaining approach, as this latter approach requires exchange in terms of the total capital one has, or what capital one can offer (bargain with something tangible).

### **How does negotiating well-being better captures the changing nature of the household, community and the society at large?**

Negotiating well-being is an *emic* notion which occurs in various contexts denoting the search for something good (good life). This is the commonsense understanding. Conceptually, as already discussed, well-being can be analysed as the search for better livelihood options. It could also be analysed as access to social, economic and political entitlements, that ensures security of lives (social security and risk avoidance mechanisms).

Negotiating well-being thus moves our unit of analysis from the household per se to looking at other spheres of society. These are for example, different societal groups and the co operation that exists among them, the intersection with the spheres of the market and ultimately the public sphere and how policies made at this level affect the household level and how decisions made by members who eat from the same pot affect debates going on at the public space.

Thus this new conceptualisation integrates the binaries of productive and reproductive work by conceptualising the two at an interface (intersection). In this way, we begin to appreciate how without reproductive work (cooking, fetching water, looking after the kids, caring for the sick, and generally searching for security of livelihoods) production cannot take place.

Thus if we are to re-conceptualise the economy of care as searching and negotiating for well-being, then we need to highlight new issues that could move different research

agendas forward. In my opinion, key issues to look out for, could be – to analyse (what I see as) the 3Cs, that is, **forms of co operation, contradictions and continuities** within the different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts and the gender relations that underlie them. It will mean analysing the different **social arrangements** that are evident to see who is **co operating** with whom at what **level** and what is the **outcome** of the co-operation. This also applies in analysing the contradictions and the continuities.

Basically, in analysing negotiation of well-being, we will be looking at the issue of gender relations in negotiating livelihoods (Tshikata: 2004c) and the different kinds of entitlements as has been exemplified in Kobou's (2004) edited book on real economies in Africa. These entitlements are for example, access to land (as one of the natural resources) and more especially the new phenomena of rising antagonism of 'we' (autochthones) as against the 'others' or (allogenes)<sup>8</sup>, in defining who has access to what. The gender relations therein, in negotiating a pluri-society that enables equitable and just access to resources by women and men sharing the same space, is an issue that could be explored in negotiating well-being. This can be extrapolated to include other natural resources like forests, minerals, national parks to name but a few.

The issue of markets, especially rural markets, and their inter-linkages with urban markets and the emergent regional economic integration. Here the increasing informalization of the economy, its continued invisibility in the formal economy and the ways in which the former can be made visible, is the important issue.

The issue of citizenship, identity and rights which moves the agenda to the public space and debates that are occurring or not occurring on this sphere. The issue of citizenship also encompasses the new phenomenon of trans-migrants, the remittances they send 'home', State building activities they are involved in and the trans-local politics they move forward both abroad and at 'home'.

The debate on social security, social provision, re-distributive mechanisms that social movements, especially female social movements seek to realize is another thematic issue that could be explored in the negotiation of well-being. How self- reflexivity at the level of the public sphere occurs, how this is done, who is moving agendas and the transformations that are occurring, is the focus here. Underpinning this is the notion of agency (Giddens 1976), which looks at people's capabilities of changing what is undesirable to them.

### **Epistemological and methodological issues in the analysis of gender relations and the negotiation of well-being**

But the above conceptualisation of moving the economy of care from where it is to looking at it as a search and negotiation of well-being has implications for the epistemology and the methodologies we adopt. By epistemology, I mean how knowledge is produced and who produces it. This implies for example, who can be "knowers" or producers of knowledge or epistemic communities (Knorr-Cetina 1981), who are the

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<sup>8</sup> For some beginnings of this debate see Nyamnjoh and Geschiere (2001:209 - 220)

researched and what can be researched. By methodologies I mean how we approach and analyze the social reality we have chosen to study.

Within these **levels of knowledge** and **knowledge production**, we will be looking at: Interconnections – that is connecting **peridiocity** (historical periods and see how they build on each other) – a **trans-historical methodology**, which looks at contexts in their **peridiocity** and tries to tease out **inter-linkages**. Here by doing a deep contextualization, not of static historical facts but the dynamic social, economic, political and religious changing contents and how people have been able to negotiate how to transpose these e.g. how people even in the conditions of SAP/violent conflicts have been able to negotiate new forms of livelihoods.

Underlying this is that people are able to grapple with structures, changing them in their course of action and thereby creating new ways (these new ways are for example, economic social and political rooms for manoeuvre) and more especially what **meaning** they give to these changes (in this way, we try to understand social reality as it presents itself). **Agency** in its many depictions is thus a methodological approach which we could adopt. Here I mean what people do when faced with challenges, how they do it, and with whom they do it.

This implies that research into this problem has to be conceptualized at a **meso level**, that is, at the **interface of the macro structures** (political sectors, social structures or social systems) and **micro level** (systems of production, modes of action, the division of activities and responsibilities, access to resources, co operation and exchanges that is social interaction and stocks of knowledge). This meso level is thus a level for analyzing structure-action changes (what Giddens (1984) conceptualizes as structuration of society). The new social or gender order that emerges is consequently of importance.

The meso level also looks at which societal groups constitute the change agents. At this level we should be looking at inter-household relations. We ought also to look at how places are interconnected to each other (Achieng' 2004). In this era of increased migration, rural-urban migration, the free flow of goods, people and cash flows, we cannot afford to look at places in isolation. There is rather a **trans-local** linkage in all these relations.

When debating well-being, then the debate of entitlement and more so **access to entitlements** (conceived of as social security, social provision and the concomitant redistributive mechanisms) cannot be ignored. Here I do mean access, not facilitated by structures such as governments and people's bargaining power or social capital but rather access through **societal institutions**, for example, the **network of relations**, e.g. kinship relations, friendship ties, Church groups, neighbourhood groups, rural-urban networking, to regional integration.

The issue of rights can thus not be divorced from this. When talking about rights, then the issues of citizenship and identity formation should be problematized. By doing this, we begin to engage in seeing how the plural identities that are evident within many

African States are formed, changed, contested by the issue of access to entitlements. More especially, how these issues are taken up/not taken up at the public sphere could one of the approaches to understanding how well-being is negotiated.

Apart from this, for African environments and for African researchers, I think engaging in comparative research is very important. This I think is one way of avoiding to go 'native' in the anthropological sense of not being able to see and thus ask critical context relevant questions. A comparative research methodology which at best ought to be multidisciplinary, also makes us see issues in new ways, noting the differences, similarities, continuities or discontinuities of notions and concepts produced in different contexts. The challenge here would be to agree upon some common but flexible epistemological and methodological grounds that take into account the social reality and social phenomena. Also what is to be compared has to be critically thought about. In my opinion, thinking about modes of action emergent of different contexts ought to be one way of going about the above mentioned issue. Needless to say, the problem of relativism in meaning and knowledge production remains central to this proposed comparative, multidisciplinary research approach. The latter observation is however beyond the scope of this paper.

### **In Conclusion**

The paper traced the debate of gender and the economy of care to its current state. I have argued in the paper that the changing social, economic and political context in Africa today poses new social realities that need to be further interrogated and explanations given. Furthermore, because of this ever changing situation, current conceptualizations need to be reworked or redirected and new vistas sought for. Citing different examples of work done, I have shown that for the theme at hand, there is a need to move the agenda from where it currently is, that is looking at gender in the economy of care, to new frontiers that is analyzing gender relations in the negotiation of well-being.

This would necessitate us to re-conceptualize issues to be interrogated and analyzed in order to seek for explanations that depict the dynamic African social realities being experienced momentarily. It also necessitates interrogating our methodologies (and consequently our methods of doing research) by incorporating new ways of looking, new issues and new approaches.

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